

The ATPL Cheat Sheet

091 VFR Communications

The facts that actually get tested, stripped to the bone: definitions, key numbers, formulas, mnemonics and the classic exam traps for each subject. Built for the night before, the commute, and the last scroll before you walk into the exam hall.

091 VFR Communications

36 memory items

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VFR Communications

Phonetic alphabet, standard phraseology, readback, light signals, squawks.

◆ PHONETIC ALPHABET, KEY NUMBERS AND SQUAWKS

A Alfa	B Bravo	C Charlie	D Delta	E Echo	F Foxtrot
G Golf	H Hotel	I India	J Juliett	K Kilo	L Lima
M Mike	N November	O Oscar	P Papa	Q Quebec	R Romeo
S Sierra	T Tango	U Uniform	V Victor	W Whiskey	X X-ray
Y Yankee	Z Zulu	3 Tree	4 Fower	5 Fife	9 Niner

7500 Hijack

7600 Radio failure

7700 Emergency

Numbers are spoken digit by digit (nine is "niner", five is "fife"); a decimal is spoken "decimal". **MAYDAY** and **PAN PAN** are each said three times. The three squawks: **7500** hijack, **7600** radio failure, **7700** general emergency.

◆ MUST-KNOW DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS

- **Readability scale 1 to 5:** 1 unreadable, 2 readable now and then, 3 readable with difficulty, 4 readable, 5 perfectly readable.
- **ROGER** = I have received all of your transmission (not agreement or compliance).
WILCO = received, understood, will comply.
- **AFFIRM** = yes; **NEGATIVE** = no / not correct / permission not granted.
- **STANDBY** = wait, I will call you. **SAY AGAIN** = repeat all or the specified part.
- **READ BACK** = repeat back exactly as received.
CORRECTION = an error was made, the correct version follows. **DISREGARD** = ignore that transmission.
- Mandatory readback items: ATC clearances, level instructions, heading and speed instructions, altimeter settings, runway-in-use, SSR codes, and any instruction to enter, hold short of, cross or backtrack a runway.
- Callsign abbreviation: only the aircraft callsign may be abbreviated, and only after the station abbreviates it first; never abbreviate the first call to a new station.
- Station types: **TWR** (Aerodrome), **APP** (Approach), **ACC/Control** (Area), **Information** (FIS), **Radar**, **Delivery**, **Ground**, **Radio** (AFIS).
- Report levels as **FLIGHT LEVEL (number)** above the transition altitude, and as **(number) FEET** below it.
- **ATIS** is a continuous broadcast of routine aerodrome/met information, coded by a phonetic letter that increments; state the code you received on first contact.
- **VOLMET** is a continuous broadcast of meteorological reports for en-route aircraft.
- **Distress** traffic has absolute priority and imposes silence on the frequency; **urgency** traffic has priority over all but distress.

◆ KEY NUMBERS, LIMITS AND VALUES

- VHF communication band **118.000 to 136.975 MHz**; emergency **121.5 MHz**.
- **8.33 kHz** channel spacing is standard in most EASA airspace; the older 25 kHz is being phased out **VERIFY**.
- **MAYDAY** and **PAN PAN** are each spoken **three times** at the start of the call.
- Transponder codes: **7500** hijack, **7600** radio failure, **7700** general emergency; **7000** is the common VFR conspicuity squawk **VERIFY**.
- Numbers are spoken digit by digit, except whole hundreds and thousands use **HUNDRED** and **THOUSAND** (4500 = four thousand five hundred).
- A frequency decimal is spoken as **DECIMAL** (118.275 = one one eight decimal two seven five).
- Time is UTC, normally passed as minutes only (two figures); the full four-figure group (hours and minutes) is used only when confusion is possible.
- Digit **9** is **NINER** and **5** is **FIFE**.
- Radio failure VFR: squawk **7600**, continue in VMC, land at the nearest suitable aerodrome.

◆ MNEMONICS AND MEMORY ITEMS

- **ROGER = Received, WILCO = Will Comply:** ROGER never acknowledges an instruction needing compliance.
- **MAYDAY = grave danger now; PAN PAN = a problem, not yet grave.**
- Squawk ladder: **7500 hijack, 7600 comms, 7700 emergency.**
- Light gun logic: **green = go, red = stop**; flashing usually means return or reposition.
- Phonetic alphabet: Alfa, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo, Foxtrot, Golf, Hotel, India, Juliett, Kilo, Lima, Mike, November, Oscar, Papa, Quebec, Romeo, Sierra, Tango, Uniform, Victor, Whiskey, X-ray, Yankee, Zulu.

◆ COMMON EXAM TRAPS

- Do not confuse **ROGER** (received) with **WILCO** (will comply).
- Light signals differ **in flight** versus **on the ground**. In flight: steady green = cleared to land, flashing green = return to land, steady red = give way and circle, flashing red = do not land. On the ground: steady green = cleared for takeoff, flashing green = cleared to taxi, steady red = stop, flashing red = taxi clear of the runway, flashing white = return to starting point.
- **7600** is radio failure, not the general emergency code (**7700**).
- **NEGATIVE** answers a yes/no question; it is not a general unable/refuse statement.
- Do not abbreviate your own callsign before ATC does.
- **QNH** gives altitude AMSL, **QFE** gives height above the reference; do not swap them.
- **READ BACK** confirms content received; **SAY AGAIN** requests a retransmission.
- State the current **ATIS** letter on first contact.
- Only the station controlling the distress (or the aircraft in distress) may lift the imposed silence.
- **STANDBY** means wait, not understood-and-will-comply.

Standard words and phrases

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Each standard word carries ONE defined meaning

AFFIRM	Yes	ACKNOWLEDGE	Let me know you have received and understood
NEGATIVE	No, that is not correct, or permission not granted	CORRECTION	An error was made; the correct version follows
ROGER	I have received all of your last transmission	DISREGARD	Consider that transmission as not sent
WILCO	I have received your message, understand it and will comply	I SAY AGAIN	I am repeating my own transmission
UNABLE	I cannot comply with the instruction	SAY AGAIN	Repeat all of your last transmission
STAND BY	Wait and I will call you	OUT	This exchange is ended, no reply is expected

1 ROGER is not WILCO

ROGER only confirms that the transmission was received; WILCO promises compliance. Never transmit 'roger wilco': WILCO already acknowledges receipt.

2 MONITOR is not CONTACT

MONITOR means listen out on the frequency without transmitting, so no initial call is made. CONTACT means tune the frequency and make an initial call.

3 NEGATIVE is not UNABLE

NEGATIVE means no, that is not correct, or permission is not granted. UNABLE means the station cannot comply with the instruction it was given.

4 SAY AGAIN, never REPEAT

SAY AGAIN asks the other station to repeat; I SAY AGAIN precedes a repeat of your own message. The word REPEAT is never used in civil radiotelephony.

Every standard word has one defined meaning: ROGER is receipt only, WILCO is receipt plus compliance, NEGATIVE is no or not granted, and UNABLE is inability to comply.

Pronunciation

0	ZE-RO	7	SEV-en
1	WUN	8	AIT
2	TOO	9	NIN-er
3	TREE	.	DAY-SEE-MAL
4	FOW-er	100	HUN-dred
5	FIFE	1000	TOU-SAND
6	SIX		

How numbers are grouped

Single digits

heading **080** → HEADING ZE-RO AIT ZE-RO

SSR code

squawk **4216** → FOW-er TOO WUN SIX

Whole thousands

5 000 ft → FIFE TOU-SAND

Thousands + hundreds

2 500 ft → TOO TOU-SAND FIFE HUN-dred

Frequency decimal

121.5 → WUN TOO WUN DAY-SEE-MAL FIFE

1 Trap words

The deliberate spellings survive a noisy radio: 3 = TREE, 4 = FOW-er, 5 = FIFE, 9 = NIN-er, and 1000 = TOU-SAND.

2 Single digits

Call signs, headings, flight levels and SSR codes are spoken digit by digit, for example 'squawk four two one six'.

3 Hundreds and thousands

Round altitudes, heights and cloud use HUNDRED and TOU-SAND, so 5000 ft is 'fife tousand' and 2500 ft is 'too tousand fife hundred'.

4 Decimal point

A frequency decimal point is spoken 'DAY-SEE-MAL', so 121.5 is 'wun too wun DAY-SEE-MAL fife'.

Numbers are spoken digit by digit (3 tree, 4 fower, 5 fife, 9 niner); round altitudes use HUNDRED and TOU-SAND; a frequency decimal point is spoken 'DAY-SEE-MAL'.

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